

Murdo, Patricia

From: Carl A. Thuesen [cthuesen@earthlink.net]
Sent: Wednesday, January 11, 2006 7:50 PM
To: Murdo, Patricia
Cc: Jolene Rieck; Shelly Engler; Bob Broughton; Janet Thomas; David Hummel
Subject: Board of Landscape Architects

Dear Ms. Murdo:

This note is in response to your recent contact with Jolene Rieck concerning subject. I wanted to express my thoughts as a member of the Board.

I am a practicing landscape architect, operating a consulting business from offices in Billings. Our firm, with 4 employees, is the second largest private landscape architecture firm in Montana and we have been in business 23 years. I have been licensed by examination in Montana since 1976 and hold license #5. I am also national CLARB certified and hold licenses in Wyoming and Idaho. I am the newest member of the Board, being appointed in late summer 2004.

As a business person I agree whole heartedly with the concept of "fees commensurate with cost". Our business would not exist if we did not adhere to this basic economic principal. In the real world you can also invert this statement, "cost commensurate with fees (income)".

The current financial crisis was introduced at the first Board meeting I attended in the fall of 2004. At that meeting, and every one since, I have asked staff to propose cuts in the budget to assist the process of making ends meet. The sword has two edges. We saw very little progress in this direction. In our April 2005 meeting "Board Counsel indicated directing and supervising authority for staff and budgeting is the responsibility of the Department..." and that the Board does not have authority to regulate their expenses. I found this incredible but through my own private counsel I have learned that the Department does have broad administrative authority. The Board has acted to raise fees, stopping short of raising them to the level proposed by staff, and has acted by formally directing staff to propose a working budget with an income of \$25,000. I should add that the modest fee increase adopted by the Board resulted in a significant reduction in the number of licenses renewed in 2005. License renewals are the major income source for the Board. This decline in renewals shows me that further licensing fee increases will accelerate this downward spiral in licensees and therefore income, ultimately resulting in loss of the Board and the public protection and professional regulation it provides.

I feel this situation is inappropriate. It is akin to leaving the fox to guard the hen house. In order to operate effectively the Boards must have the basic ability to manipulate expenses as well as income. The Department should serve as support to the Boards, which I feel should retain executive authority.

Montana is growing rapidly. Much of this growth is occurring in sectors such as real estate development, where our profession will make major contributions to what this state becomes in the very near future. It is very important, now more than any time in the past, that Montana protect its essence and its populace with strong functioning Boards, including the Board of Landscape Architects. Due to this financial condition, and staff's reluctance to respond with meaningful budgetary cuts, our Board activities have been "frozen" indefinitely. I feel this action is a true disservice to the people of Montana and a disgrace to the Department.

I trust that we will be able to make rapid progress to reinstatement of the Board, and to revise current policies concerning financial management of all the Boards.

Sincerely,

Carl A. Thuesen

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